

The

# Eagle's Eye

Fall / Winter 2010

Florida Air National Guard

Volume 10, Issue 3



## TRANSITIONS

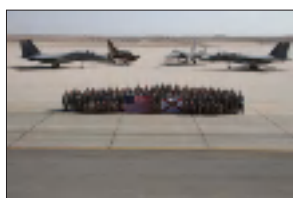




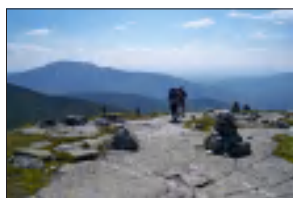
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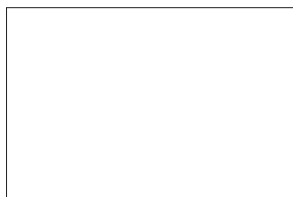
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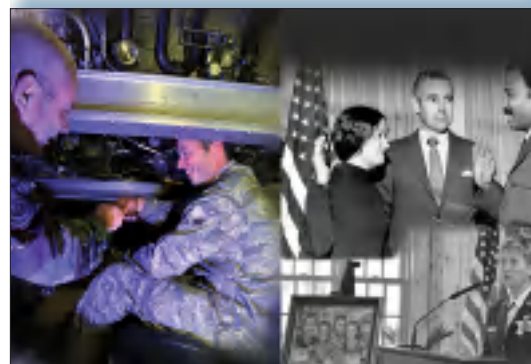
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**FRONT COVER:** Master Sgt. Kent Pearson passes a tool to A1C Steven Poust while working on an engine at the 125th Fighter Wing.

**BACK COVER:** Top Photo: CMSgt Susan Shonk enlisting in the Florida Air National Guard, bottom photo: CMSgt Susan Shonka speaking at her retirement ceremony.

# Commander's Column

By Brig. Gen. Joseph G. Balskus  
Assistant Adjutant General for Air  
Commander, Florida Air National Guard

I am extremely excited about this edition of our Eagles Eye! It is about transitioning and being prepared for our future. In this edition, we have news about the Chief of Staff of the Florida Air National Guard, Brig Gen Kirk "Blade" Martin who has been selected as the Air National Guard Assistant to the Surgeon General of the Air Force (USAF/SG) and dual-hatted as Director, Office of the Joint Surgeon, National Guard Bureau.

This is a remarkable opportunity for an incredible member of the FLANG and we wish him and his bride Vicki all the best as they move on in a career with the Air National Guard (see story on Page 5). With his selection, a vacancy was created and we were pleased to announce our choice of Col. Bob Branyon, the current 125th Fighter Wing commander. Col. Branyon has a Certificate of Eligibility to brigadier general, and on January 7, 2011, he is scheduled to become the 10th Chief of Staff in the history of our great organization and pin on his new rank. The 125FW's new Commander will be Col. James O. Eifert. In this edition you will read about the retirement of Chief Master Sgt. Susan Shonka (Page

14) who made an indelible mark on our great organization.

With the great news, I am proud we're prepared for change with superb bench strength, and we are ready to press into another chapter without missing a beat. I love this about us. We are meeting challenges and making a difference each and every day. Quite honestly, we had a shock two months ago when our Alert Detachment at Homestead failed to meet the NORAD Alert Force Evaluation criteria and we found ourselves in unfamiliar territory. In an unprecedented manner, 1AF, NORAD/NORTHCOM, along with the total trust of our Adjutant General, had so much confidence in us we were allowed to "fix ourselves," and within one month we were revisited and ready. The inspection team came back and the report was Outstanding with a full Mission Ready rating. Our Alert

Aircraft had zero discrepancies and the Ops inspector lauded the employment phase as best seen in his two and a half years as IG. In my follow-on notes to the wing and DET leadership, here is what I said:

"You looked this situation in the eye, and you pulled together and demonstrated how the result of the initial inspection was not a failure. It was an opportunity. An opportunity to re-focus and improve our outstanding organization even more; an opportunity to strengthen our training programs; our mentorship efforts; our checklist; our attention to detail; and our team; an opportunity to excel and demonstrate how we are the best. You capitalized on the opportunity and showcased our culture of excellence. Well Done!"

This spirit; this dedication and determination to achieve;

*'This spirit; this dedication and determination to achieve; this culture is seen in each and every unit in the FLANG.'*

this culture is seen in each and every unit in the FLANG. If you glance at the 114th Range Operations Squadron you will find a new initiative to add manpower to hold the primary positions on the Eastern Range. Combine this with an operationally accepted the Transportable Communications and Telemetry System (TCATS) and you've got the recipe for sustained FLANG presence in Space. Go over to the panhandle and look at the amazing presence of our 101st Air Operations Group and look how

day after day we are the primary suppliers of manpower for 1AF and the NORAD/NORTHCOM command and control mission. Their recent involvement in Haiti rescue efforts, Deep Water Horizons and success during a recent exercise to test our response to a nuclear attack is testimony to the tremendous talent in that organization. Go across the street and you will see how five FLANG pilots are now flying in the F-22 Raptor and how we are poised to expand our presence with weapons officers to compliment the

needs of USAF. We are making it happen all over the state and I couldn't be more proud of the men and women of the FLANG. We are training vigorously as you will read with our Fighter Wing exercise in Saudi Arabia (Page 17) and all over the state training is energized so we will be ready to do the state and nations business. Our FLANG honors those who have served and we celebrate each day the young energy coming in. Enjoy this edition of the Eagles Eye!

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## Chief's Counsel

*By Chief Master Sgt. Charles W. Wisniewski  
State Command Chief Master Sergeant*

During October Unit Training Assembly, we held our last Town Hall meeting of 2010 at Camp Blanding Joint Training Center, meeting with the Top 3 Noncommissioned Officers from the 159th Weather Flight, Weather Readiness Training Center and 202nd REDHORSE.

Brig. Gen. Balskus started our Town Hall meetings a couple of years ago as a way for him and his senior enlisted staff to sit down face-to-face with our enlisted personnel around the state. Not only did he want to hear their concerns and issues directly from them, but he also wanted to know their goals, why they joined the Florida Air National Guard and why they choose to serve their country.

Our team – headed up by Brig. Gen. Balskus, Chief Master Sgt. Chip Hartin (state Human Resources Advisor), Laura

Pageau (Family Readiness), Senior Master Sgt. Michelle Hicks (Recruiting and Retention) and myself – has learned a great deal from Airmen during these visits.

Many of our younger Airmen joined the FLANG to pursue their education using the benefits offered to them for service to the nation. However, as they talk with Brig. Gen. Balskus, you soon learn that they also joined because they share our love of country and the desire to serve our nation. They have fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters who have served in the military and they are proud of them and desire to continue that heritage of service.

Over the next several few years, we will see mission changes within our state and most likely financial challenges as our economy suffers and our national debt increases. Budget cuts will

hit everything including defense.

One of the things that I have always known about our Airmen and that has been confirmed over and over again at our Town Hall meetings is that we have the greatest asset that any organization needs – people who love what they do. Our Airmen are smart, eager and above all Patriots! They will be our key to success as we continue to evolve as the FLANG.

This organization has never been satisfied with the status quo. We are always looking to the future – taking on new missions, striving to find better and more efficient ways of doing business. That can only happen when you have the caliber of people we have: innovative, intelligent, hardworking and – most importantly – Patriots who love their country and are proud to serve her.



# News from HQ

*By Master Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa  
FLNG Public Affairs*

Florida Air National Guard Chief of Staff Brig. Gen. Joseph Kirk Martin will serve as the senior medical general officer for the Air National Guard, as he was selected as the Air National Guard Assistant to the surgeon general, United States Air Force.

In this dual-hatted position, Martin will also serve as the director, Office of the Joint Surgeon, National Guard Bureau.

“Brig. Gen. Martin brings impressive skills as both a leader and a physician to this important position,” said Adjutant General of Florida Maj. Gen. Emmett Titshaw. “Kirk has a proven record of success in a series of very demanding jobs. I am proud to see his selection -- he is definitely one of Florida’s best.”

As the ANG Assistant to the United States Air Force Surgeon General, he will be the advisor to the ANG Director, the USAF surgeon general, and the ANG air surgeon. This includes making recommendations, input and proposed solutions on ANG matters of programs, policy, and operations. As the joint surgeon, National Guard Bureau, he will

be an advisor to the chief and the director, National Guard Bureau. This will include coordinating joint medical planning, training, and operations between the Air and Army National Guard, NORTHCOM, and many interagency government offices.

Martin – whose has served in several high-profile military and civilian medical positions during his career – noted that he enjoyed his previous assignment as the Florida Air National Guard Chief of Staff and was impressed with the capabilities of all the ANG units in Florida.

“Moving from the Medical Corps to a line general officer position was tremendously enlightening as I got to really know the missions and the two thousand talented men and women of the Florida Air National Guard,” he said. “We have a very complicated and diverse mission with our 10 [geographically separated units] assigned to multiple [major commands]. Every day, Florida Air National Guard members work to ensure our air sovereignty, space launch, flying training, combat communications, weather training, homeland defense, and many other key missions, and we do so at reduced cost to our nation.

“The Guard is a value to America, and our Guardsmen are true professionals,” the general continued. “I have great respect for every one of them. Their excellence is also recognized over the 54 states, territories, and the District of Columbia.” In his civilian career, Dr. Martin is an emeritus surgical oncologist at Mayo Clinic, Jacksonville, Fla. He is a professor of surgery at Mayo Clinic College of Medicine and adjunct professor of surgery at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences. Martin is the author of numerous articles in peer-reviewed journals.

“I am proud of every one of our Guard members,” he said. “I am a Florida Guardsman, and I will always carry that with me...I have been honored to serve as the ninth chief of staff for the Florida Air National Guard.”



FLANG Chief of Staff Brig. Gen. Joseph Kirk Martin

# Continuous Process Improvement

*By Tech. Sgt. William Buchanan  
125FW Public Affairs*

What do Motorola, Toyota and the U.S. Air Force have in common? The answer is Continuous Process Improvement.

Known by different terms in different industries, CPI is the ongoing effort to reduce unnecessary effort while also reducing errors.

While the Air Force as a whole has taken steps to become more efficient, the 125th Fighter Wing has stepped forward and embraced the concept with the goal of making CPI second nature.

“Our vision for CPI is to make a cultural change where people naturally implement and use CPI tools in their work areas,” said Lt. Col. Robert Wetzel, director of 125FW Continuous Process Improvement.

Wetzel likened CPI to a morning routine. Airmen wake, shower, dress and drive to work. Each individual finds the best order to do these activities and the quickest route to drive while avoiding traffic congestion. CPI tools help Airmen do the same thing at work, finding the best order of operations and the quickest route to a goal.

The 125FW adopted the idea in the summer of 2009, and leadership created a strategic plan published in January 2010. In June the plan was updated and then republished, outlining the goals, objectives and metrics of the 125FW. Metrics are a way of measuring and tracking progress; they essentially turn qualitative change into quantitative values.

Following the plan, trained CPI facilitators observe a working group, determine if goals are being met, and find ways to improve any inefficiency, Wetzel said. However, changes made are not to the entire processes but rather to segments or specific steps within processes where issues occur. For example, the issue of unsubmitted Fitness Screening Questionnaires may not be due to Airmen’s laziness in not turning them in, but rather to the forms sitting on someone’s desk unfiled.

“This allows for a more predictable and sustainable change,” Wetzel said. “System-wide changes are disruptive and expensive.”

Facilitators are Airmen who attend academic

training and earn certification through on-the-job training. Green Belts attend only one week of academics and work on smaller issues, such as shop-specific problems; Black Belts attend four weeks of training and work on more complex, cross-functional issues that impact large groups or multiple departments.

All Airmen are eligible to attend training to become facilitators, and volunteers from various career fields are encouraged to do so.

Wetzel quoted Henry Ford, saying, “If you think of standardization as the best that you know today, but which is to be improved tomorrow, you get somewhere.” This concept is another lynchpin of CPI.

“People hide behind their standards,” Wetzel said. “Yes, it’s good to have standards, but you have to be willing to adjust your standards and establish a new standard of excellence.”

As facilitators assess process improvement they document and report the team’s findings to sponsors. Sponsors have both the desire and authority to implement changes to the process. In the 125FW this role is often filled by, among others, Col. Bob Branyon and Col. Jim Eifert, the commander and vice commander, respectively. The sponsors remain engaged throughout the improvement project and ultimately approve any changes.

This process creates a feedback loop that allows leadership the opportunity to communicate goals and assess progress toward and completion of those goals. This helps reduce what Wetzel called “tampering,” which is changing things based on hunches. By observing the facts, management can base decisions on evidence leading to a more stable and successful process over time, Wetzel said.

Although the strategic plan projects only five years down the road, that’s just the beginning, Wetzel said. He said CPI’s mission will be complete when it’s so engrained facilitators won’t be necessary, and it’s part of our culture.

“The goal is to not need a process improvement office in the future, per se,” Wetzel said, “but to have it become just the way we do business.”



# 125FW Commander Branyon selected as chief of staff for the Florida Air National Guard

By Master Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa  
FLNG Public Affairs

125th Fighter Wing Commander Col. Robert Branyon is stepping out of the cockpit and taking the reins as the Florida Air National Guard Chief of Staff.

Branyon will follow Brig. Gen. Joseph Kirk Martin, who has been selected as the Air National Guard Assistant to the U.S. Air Force Surgeon General.

“Col. Branyon has been a tremendous leader at the Wing,” said Adjutant General of Florida Maj. Gen. Emmett Titshaw, calling him an “extremely engaged commander who does an outstanding job balancing people with mission.”

A command pilot with more than 3,300 flying hours, Branyon joined the FLANG in July 1991 as an F-16 Falcon pilot and in May 1995, transitioned to the F-15 Eagle. He commanded the 125th Logistics Group and the 159th Fighter Squadron and, later, served as vice commander of the 125FW.

“Selection as the new FLANG chief of staff means that I need to step further back in my view of the Wing and the State,” Branyon said. “I must focus on what’s best for every one of the Air components of our Florida Air National Guard and I need to focus on, not only what’s best for Florida, but what’s best for the entire Air National Guard. Additionally, I must understand how we fit in with our Army brothers and sisters in Florida and how, together, we can make the best team in leading

our State and our Country forward in these next challenging years.”

Branyon explained that he believes a high operations tempo combined with lean financial times will shape the near-future of the FLANG.

“We are not likely to get more people or more money, so we must focus on doing things

more effectively and efficiently. I look forward to supporting the Strategic Planning System started by Brig. Gen. Balskus and to serving on his headquarters staff. Within Priority 1 of SPS we will be able to develop more programs to mentor our younger and mid-level leaders

to become the best officers and enlisted force possible. We need to have the right leaders in the future with good skill sets and processes in place to work smartly and efficiently to get the mission done.”

As he takes this new position as chief of staff, Branyon said one of the things he will miss most is being a fighter pilot at the 125FW.

“As any fighter pilot who is worth his salt, I will miss flying fighters, especially the F-15,” he said. “But, with over 28 years of continuously flying fast jets, to include the F-4, F-5, F-16, and F-15, I have had way more than my share of fun and challenging missions. As with everything else at the Fighter Wing, I will miss the people more than I will miss the cockpit!”

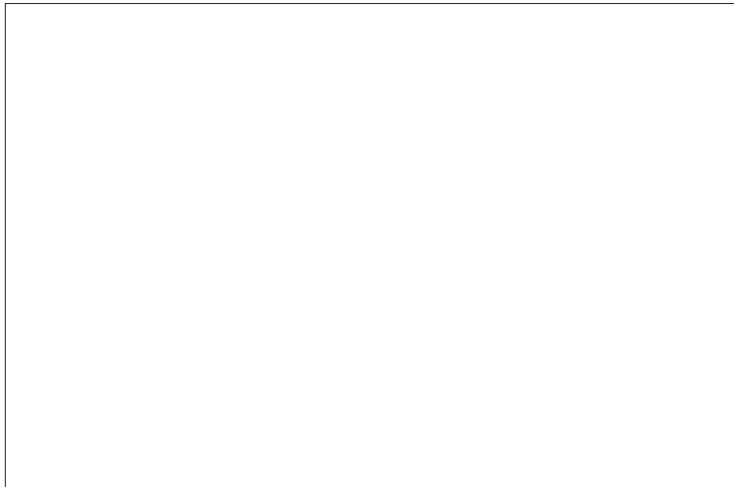


Photo by Master Sgt. Shelley Gill

Col. Bob Branyon stands with his flight helmet in front of an F-15 Eagle.

# Brig. Gen. Balskus selected as executive chairman of ANG Strategic Planning System

*By Master Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa  
FLNG Public Affairs*

Commander of the Florida Air National Guard Brig. Gen. Joseph Balskus has been selected to a national position that will shape the future of Air National Guard operations and strategies.

Lt. Gen. Bud Wyatt, director of the Air National Guard, announced the selection of Florida's Assistant Adjutant General for Air and commander in front of a national audience during the ANG Senior Leadership Conference in D.C. Nov. 17. Balskus will follow Maj. Gen. Gary Magonigle who served as executive chairman for the past two years bringing continuity and corporate knowledge from having served as the executive vice chair under Magonigle.

The Strategic Planning System (SPS) is a field-driven collaborative process to shape the Air National Guard's strategic direction through "the development of priorities, goals, and objectives in accordance with the ANG vision and guiding principles. It is a transparent process and recognizes the importance of the relationship with the Adjutant Generals in the 50 states, 3 territories, and the district.

"It is a very humbling experience and a great honor to participate on a national committee that has a direct line of communication with the

director," he said. "I appreciate the confidence the Adjutant General had to nominate me, and the confidence the director of the Air National Guard had to select me for this."

He explained the chairmanship is an additional

duty and will require some time in the district, but his involvement will only strengthen the FLANG strategic planning as it addresses such things as fifth generation fighters in Jacksonville and the expansion of our presence in Space at Cape Canaveral.

SPS is a revamped version of the Integrated Planning Process (IPP), and was "energized" four years ago when Gen. McKinley became Director of the Air National Guard. The new system – which represents

all states and territories – has gained wide acceptance by the ANG and USAF leadership.

"To assume the chairmanship validates the hard work we've done over the past two years and the confidence the new director had in our system due to our successes," Balskus said.

Successes have included the development of a nation-wide Future Mission Data Base and a new Force Development Plan for officers and enlisted. SPS is currently working its first joint project to operationalize the message of Diversity throughout the National Guard.





# Weather apprentices put their training to the test at the Army Aviation Support Facility



A weather apprentice uses a weather meter to take weather observations in support of military flight operations.

By Maj. John Waldbillig  
Commandant, WRTC

Fifty weeks! After such a long time training at Keesler Air Force Base, Miss., and at the Weather Readiness Training Center (WRTC) at Camp Blanding Joint Training Center, Fla., weather apprentices culminate their training with three weeks at the Army Aviation Support Facility (AASF) at Cecil Field, Fla. It is during these last few weeks of training that Air National Guard weather apprentices finally apply all of the training they have learned to operational use. It is here that they begin the first of many operational briefings and forecasts.

With the permission of Lt. Col. James Lord of the 1/111<sup>th</sup> Brigade, the AASF provides the optimal operational environment and a great opportunity for these new weather technicians to showcase their respective meteorological and

briefing skills in “real time/real world” support of Army operations.

While at the AASF, the weather apprentices support missions for four different airframes, including the CH-47, HH-60M, UH-72 and the OH-58. During their operational support there, they provide an array of products to the aviators and mission planners, and perform responsibilities similar to an Air Force Weather Station and AEF location operations.

As part of the list of products and reports that are produced, the students prepare visibility charts, which give instant visual range information for flight operations. The students take hourly observations, providing instant information for planners and aircrew. If weather conditions degrade, the frequency of observations taken increases as needed sometimes every 15-20 minutes of real time updates. Daily products are also produced for mission planning, but the main bulk of their work is providing weather briefings to Army aviators. As weather forecaster, it is the students’ and their trainers’ responsibility to execute mission watch, during which they monitor weather conditions and advise planners and aircrews on alternative solutions to their routes and missions.

In this three-week period, the weather apprentices are exposed to flight operations that they have never experienced before in their young weather career. Most times the students are given orientation flights to confirm their forecasted weather, sky conditions and visibility which enable real time feedback and emphasize the importance of their product and work. As they fly in the aircraft they are supporting, they get the opportunity to see firsthand the conditions they forecasted from the ground and how accurate they are. With this hands-on experience, the students are then be able to leave the WRTC with a full understanding of how Army aviation units conduct their flight operations.

# Taking It Personally

## 290th enlisted personnel find opportunity in downsizing

*By Lt. Col. Loretta Lombard  
290 JCSS Commander*

The 290th Joint Communications Support Squadron was deep into transformation in October 2008 when our manpower was officially reduced from 238 to 190. If that wasn't dramatic enough, our mission and organizational configuration was also restructured to better align with our new Everything-Over-Internet-Protocol (EOIP) equipment and smaller team sizes. It was a time of great change – and with change comes opportunity.

It could have been something in the water in Tampa, but I believe it was more something in the culture of the 290JCSS – a culture focused on improvement, innovation and growth. While many people might have been focused on losing their jobs in such a circumstance, an unprecedented number of our enlisted members stepped forward to become officers.

Since October 2008, we have had four members leave Florida for Air National Guard officer opportunities around the country; two transferred to the Army Reserves or National

Guard, and three more have been selected for positions within our state. It is not just a testament to the culture of the 290JCSS, but also to the character of these individuals.

Tech. Sgt. Michael Jerman has been an outstanding tactical communicator while acquiring his degree and working as an accountant in a distinguished Tampa firm. He will bring his diverse skills to the 125th Fighter Wing Logistics Squadron when he graduates from the Academy of Military Science (AMS) before the end of this year.

Staff Sgt. David Johnson has skyrocketed in his short tenure at our unit. He has deployed numerous times and was a lead instructor at the Joint Communications Support Element, training communications personnel on the latest EOIP equipment. His eloquence and pre-law education made him a standout applicant for the state Military Equal Opportunity officer vacancy. He is scheduled to leave for AMS in January 2011.

It is hoped that Master Sgt. Thomas “Paul” Martin, who has been in the unit for over eight years, will also be in that class. He has deployed on multiple occasions and supported state emergency needs. He will become the 290JCSS's newest Cyber Operations Officer upon graduation.

Their motivation to become officers is as varied as their backgrounds. Johnson came from a rich military history and it was his plan from a young age. Martin only entertained the idea after being enlisted and encouraged by his mother. Jerman's multi-generational Navy family had plans for him to attend the Naval Academy, but he wasn't interested. His interest grew after seeing the ROTC students in his college and he eventually joined the ANG which helped fund his education. For him, the Guard was a hobby that grew to be more.


“I wanted to be an officer when I graduated from [the University of South Florida] in 2006,”



*Photo Courtesy 290th JCSS*

Master Sgt. Thomas Martin (standing right) oversees his team's training in preparation for the deployment to Afghanistan in fall 2009.





said Jerman, “but it took until 2009 to be selected,” due to the transformations and BRAC reductions across the military. “I hope to bring an analytical, organized perspective to the Wing.”

Jerman also said he is looking forward to working with Lt. Col. Bartosh and his team, and expects his personal transformation to include a full workload with more than just weekend work as he begins his officer career. Jerman said, but he plans to focus on management and developing personnel.

Johnson already had his bachelor’s degree before he joined the Guard.

“I always believed that my time enlisted better prepared me for this opportunity,” he said.

Being proficient at his job, receiving acknowledgement from his peers and superiors, and developing patience while being persistent were huge factors in his journey to being selected for the officer ranks.

“I have always been a leader – in my family, as captain in college basketball, as a communications team leader on several deployments - and I will continue to work hard for my Senior NCOs, NCOs an Airmen,” Johnson said.

As he begins his career as an officer, Johnson foresees one of his biggest challenges being “transforming from receiving direction and guidance to the one in which I’m giving instructions and guidance.”

“Another challenge will be transitioning from the Joint environment and moving away from my 290th family,” he said with emotion in his words. “It will be very hard because of the relationships built over the last five years. This is an opportunity for me to thank the many who have helped me along the way by doing an outstanding job in my new role as the Military Equal Opportunity Officer.”

Johnson said he is excited to be in a new unit with new roles, new responsibilities, new people and new friends, and he anticipates his future with a positive glow.

“I am definitely going to bring a lot of enthusiasm and energy,” Johnson said. “I can’t wait to get started.”

Martin took the long road. After 10 colleges, he finally had the credit hours in the right areas to complete his bachelor’s degree, but he did not stop

there. He pressed onward to complete his master’s degree and then still waited before applying for any officer positions.

“It wasn’t until the 290JCSS advertised its position that I finally buckled down, took the dreaded Air Force Officer Qualification Test, and submitted my application,” he said with a sigh.

His timing was spot-on. After a nervous interview and anxious weeks waiting for the results, he got the call that is setting his career on the higher road.

“Communications is ever changing,” Martin said. “By staying on top of the technology, although I may not be able to get my hands dirty, I’ll be able to help my newly acquired troops by leading and managing, and by looking at the bigger picture.”

Martin sees it as taking a lot of self-control to not reach out and help on the equipment. With all those years with his hands “on,” he is glad for his time as a Senior Noncommissioned Officer to step back a bit and provide direction to others.

“Although I’m still expected to know the equipment and be an expert, I hope to become decentralized and better with the unit as a whole,” he said.

Martin sees his biggest transformation challenge in being a leader among the people he has known since he was a senior airman.

“I have gained respect, but respect as an NCO. It is a different type than to an officer,” he said.

One of his goals as an officer is to see the reinstatement of the airborne parachutists’ positions in the 290th.

“It has been a part of the unit since its origin – not solely as providing airborne infiltration of communications, but as a means to place people in operations we support,” Martin said. “This way we can be one of the best Special Operations Forces supporting Air National Guard units out there!”

With all the officer candidates to recently come out of the 290JCSS, I am confident we have kept some of the brightest stars in the Florida Air National Guard. My hopes are that others may find their way back to Florida as their careers progress. Transformation can be a scary process, but some people see the light in the darkness, the potential in the energy, and the possibilities to soar. Bring on the future!

# National Guard's first F-35 pilot ready for action at new squadron

By Master Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa  
FLNG Public Affairs

The National Guard's first F-35 pilot has arrived at his new unit and is ready to take on the Air Force's newest fifth-generation jet fighter.

Florida Air National Guard pilot Maj. Jay Spohn arrived at the 58th Fighter Squadron at Eglin Air Force Base this summer, and said he is ready to begin training and honing the skills it will take to master the F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter.

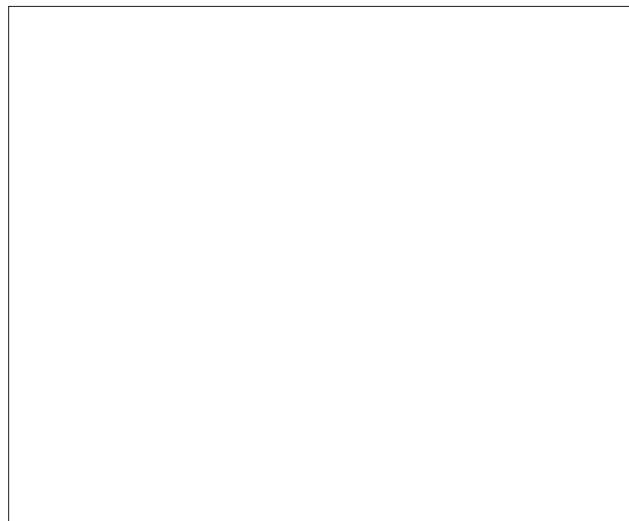
As the only Guardsman at the Air Force's first F-35 squadron, Spohn said he is humbled to have been chosen for the position, but is ready to show his active duty counterparts that he is prepared for the challenge.

"I feel it's important for me or any Air National Guardsman or reservist who comes [here] – especially in these early stages – to show that we're as good as or better than our active duty counterparts," Spohn, 35, said. "The fact that we are Guardsmen or reservists should be invisible to our counterparts. My hope is that I'm looked at as one of the stronger guys here, and I'm going to do everything that I can do to put myself in that category."

Until the 58th Fighter Squadron actually receives the F-35 aircraft, Spohn will serve as the chief of standards and evaluation at the unit. When the jets eventually arrive at Eglin, Spohn and the other pilots will follow-up their academic and simulator training with actual flight time in the much-touted fighters.

The Guardsman said he sees how the F-35 program reflects the recently published leadership philosophy of Florida Adjutant General Maj. Gen. Emmett Titshaw titled "Linking Our Heritage to Our Horizons." Spohn said flying the F-35 will probably be a synthesis of more than 30 years of jet fighter tactics and state-of-the-art technology.

"It will probably not be the way we did things in the previous generation of fighters," Spohn said, "but it's also probably not going to be a clean slate



*Photo by Master Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa*

Maj. Jay Spohn, the first F-35 pilot for the National Guard, poses outside the 58th Fighter Squadron at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., August 2010.

where we do everything differently."

Based on his F-35 simulator time, Spohn said he is really impressed with the technological capabilities the new plane will have over earlier generations of jets.

"The capability of the radar is just amazing compared to the previous generation of radars that we have," he explained. "You used to have to pull in data from several different sources and assimilate that all in your head. The F-35 does a lot of that for you. I really feel that it is going to give you a capability in the air-to-air environment to know better what is going on around you, and ultimately if you know that you can make a more informed decision and take appropriate action."

Like many pilots, flying is more than just a job to Spohn: it is a passion. He said he remembers watching movies like "Top Gun" when he was a child, and when he joined the Civil Air Patrol in high school he got hooked on the idea of actually climbing into a cockpit and taking the "stick" of a fighter jet.

"As far back as I can remember I wanted to fly





Photo Courtesy Lockheed Martin

fighters,” he said. “Honestly I didn’t particularly care whether it was for the Navy, the Marines or the Air Force; it just worked out that I knew about the Air National Guard.”

After college at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Fla., he joined the Pennsylvania ANG and flew A-10 Thunderbolts from December 2001 until March 2007. During that time he deployed to Bagram, Afghanistan, for Operation Enduring Freedom, and later to Kuwait for Operation Iraqi Freedom, where he flew close-air-support missions for coalition forces during the initial invasion of Iraq.

He added that he brings his experience of flying the A-10 to the new F-35 squadron, and feels he can offer a fresh perspective of providing close-air-support missions in combat.

“I feel like my role in the F-35 squadron is to do whatever I can to bring the A-10 perspective to the close-air-support mission.”

After serving briefly in the Arkansas ANG, Spohn was selected in November 2009 for training as the Guard’s first F-35 pilot.

***‘As far back as I can remember I wanted to fly fighters. Honestly I didn’t particularly care whether it was for the Navy, the Marines or the Air Force; it just worked out that I knew about the Air National Guard.’***

FLANG Commander Brig. Gen. Joseph Balskus, who served as the chairman of the selection board with representation from National Guard Bureau, Air Combat Command and the FLANG, explained that Spohn’s selection to the F-35 program reflected his talents as an aviator.

“The application itself was very restrictive with specific qualifying criteria, and we went through a pool of amazingly talented fighter pilots from across the nation to get down to the final four,”

Balskus said. “Maj. Spohn’s interview demonstrated an incredible amount of energy, motivation, unrestricted availability and desire. This, combined with his background as an aviator, made our choice unanimous.”

After transferring to the FLANG, Spohn began training on the F-15C Eagle jet fighter at Tyndall Air Force Base – a course giving him air-to-air training that would match his extensive air-to-ground experience from the A-10s. Following that training Spohn arrived at Eglin Air Force Base in July.

# FLANG's first female enlistee retires

By Master Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa  
FLNG Public Affairs

After more than 37 years of service to the Florida Air National Guard, Chief Master Sgt. Susan Shonka has officially ended her military career.

The former Command Chief Master Sergeant of the FLANG retired on Aug. 31, completing a memorable and historic career in uniform.

The Jacksonville-native enlisted in the military in March 1973, earning the distinction of being the first female to enlist in the FLANG. She said that initially the all-male force was unfamiliar with seeing a female in uniform. This was evident the first day she walked into the crowded, noisy mess hall at the 125th Fighter Wing and everyone turned to stare at her.

"It became absolutely quiet... They just weren't used to it," Shonka recollected. "One of the guys tried to block me as I was getting out... I just hauled off and kicked the guy. But it got easier (a few months later) as more and more females started trickling in."

As her career progressed Shonka held several positions at the 125FW and state headquarters, including: mission support flight information management supervisor/records manager; support group first sergeant; state headquarters information management superintendent; and state human resources advisor.

She said the greatest changes she's seen in the Florida Air National Guard during her career were a steady increase in the operational tempo and a growing professionalism among the Guardsmen.

"It used to be easygoing, but now the ops-tempo has just grown," she said. "And the people have become more professional; they really take it seriously. They're very sharp. Some people criticize the kids of today because they don't understand them, but we have young Airmen coming in because they have military pride. They just want to serve."

In November 1997 Shonka made history again as she became the first female Guardsman to make the rank of chief master sergeant in Florida, and a

few years later in 2001 she became the first female to become the Command Chief Master Sergeant of the FLANG.

According to FLANG Commander Brig. Gen. Joseph Balskus, Shonka's promotion to the top enlisted position came at a time when the organization was truly coming together – the headquarters, fighter wing, and the geographically separated units (GSUs) were synchronizing their missions and operations.

"The relationship we had as a commander and a command chief was unprecedented," he said. "We brought the Florida Air National Guard together during our watch, and that continues today."

During that time Brig. Gen. Balskus and Command Chief Master Sgt. Shonka traveled around the state to meet with the different GSUs to show them that the "command leadership team" was available and willing to help.

"My main goal when I became command chief was to get out to the different GSUs, and I think I did that almost every month," Shonka said.

Shonka also served on the National Guard Bureau Year of Diversity Committee, helped improve and was responsible for the ANG's Chief Master Sergeant course, served on the ANG Enlisted Field Advisory Council as a Regional Representative, Vice Chairman and was instrumental in standardizing the FLANG's Airmen of the Year program.

She also was actively involved with the C.W. Bill Young Department of Defense Bone Marrow Program, and in 1997 became a bone marrow donor.

While she no longer wears the uniform, Shonka will still be serving the FLANG in a civilian capacity in the personnel section at the Air Guard Headquarters in St. Augustine.

"I still get out of the car and look for my hat," she noted, describing the difficulty of switching from a military to a civilian role. "It was very hard; I really struggled with it because it was my life – I really enjoyed taking care of Airmen."

# 101st AOG stands up at Tyndall AFB

By Capt. Jared Scott  
601AOC Public Affairs

The 601st Air and Space Operations Center held a ceremony Aug. 21 to commemorate the activation of the 101st Air and Space Operations Group. The 101AOG provides the manning for the 601st Air Operations Command to fulfill their mission of defending the homeland. The 101AOG, formerly known as the Southeast Air Defense Sector, officially stood up July 1, 2009.

"The 601AOC and the 101AOG have a no-fail mission," said Col. Scott Barberides, 101AOG commander. "Around the clock, 24-7, we never turn the lights off, and people are working right now defending our skies."

The 601AOC, often referred to as America's AOC, is responsible for detecting, deterring, defending and if necessary, defeating any aviation threat to citizens and to U.S. critical infrastructure.

"The 601st is made up roughly of 550 people, with 350 of those folks being 101st AOG members," said Col. Randy Spear, 601st AOC commander. "If the 601st were a car, the 101st would be the engine and the drive train that makes the 601AOC mission happen."

The ceremony was presided over by Brig. Gen. Joseph Balskus, Florida Air National Guard commander. The ceremony was complete with

the changing of the flags representing the unit's transition from the Southeast Air Defense Sector to the 101st AOG.

"It started after Sept. 11, 2001," said Balskus. "We, as the Department of Defense, had to reconfigure ourselves, and a part of that reconfiguration was to transform the Southeast Air Defense Sector into the 101AOG."

The Southeast Air Defense Sector was originally established as the Montgomery Air Defense Sector in September 1957.

Effective Oct. 16, 1995, SEADS transitioned from the U.S. Air Force to the Air National Guard, and became a Geographically Separated Unit assigned within the FLANG.

The tragic events of 9/11 marked a change in the way SEADS, North American Aerospace Defense Command, and United States Northern Command monitored air traffic. Prior to 9/11, NORAD had only monitored air traffic entering CONUS airspace. After 9/11, NORAD, along with the Federal Aviation Administration, started to monitor all the air traffic in CONUS airspace.

Operation Noble Eagle, the military's response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, became the focus of SEADS, NORAD and USNORTHCOM, ensuring the safety of America.

SEADS' mission was relocated to the Eastern Air Defense Sector in November 2006 and it took on a new role. Now known as the 601st Air and Space Operations Center, the AOC monitors all the air traffic in the continental U.S.

On June 1, 2007, the 601AOC opened the doors on its new, state-of-the-art, 37,000 square-foot, \$30.5 million air and space operations center. This new facility enhances the 601AOC's ability to protect America's skies from attack, and provides lifesaving relief during disasters.

"We have a proud heritage with the state of Florida, and a noble past with the Southeast Air Defense Sector," said Col. Barberides. "That truly is the heart and soul of the 101st AOG."



Photo by Capt. Jared Scott

A ceremony was conducted for the newly established 101st Air and Space Operations Group, August 21, at Tyndall AFB, Fla.



# Weather Flight diversifies into new UAS support role

By Master Sgt. Nick Barnhardt  
159th Weather Flight

The 159<sup>th</sup> Weather Flight has consistently supported the Florida Army National Guard's 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) since the weather flight's inception in 1992. During the weather flight's 18-year history, the unit has never supported an IBCT-imbedded aviation mission – until now.

In 2009, the Florida National Guard began fielding the Shadow Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) and set up Company B, Special Troops Battalion, 53rd IBCT to fly the unmanned aerial vehicles.

The 159WF began collaborations with the platoon to set up weather support for the mission in May of this year as the platoon began qualification of soldiers as operators and maintainers. The joint training took place at Camp Blanding Joint Training Center, Fla., where both units are stationed.

The new aerial platform provided a myriad of new challenges for weather flight personnel. Precise weather elements had to be forecast to ensure that the Shadows UAS's sensitive avionics were not affected by weather hazards. Flight members worked with the operators to ensure that the weather elements within the airspace met the

platform's minimum weather requirements for operation.

Forecasting for the Shadow UAS also offered forecasters real-world feedback from the operators on forecasted weather elements, an aspect not usually offered during training scenarios. Forecasters also had the challenge of predicting weather effects on the Shadows' sensor arrays, giving flight members the unique opportunity of real-time feedback from the operators on the output of the 159WF's specialized target acquisition weather software.

The joint training has already paid dividends as the platoon initial fielding was completed over the summer. The training allowed the platoon to take further steps in preparing itself for future deployment into the fight or for deployment in support of state emergencies.

As Senior Master Sgt. Carlos "Charlie" Delanuez, chief of Weather Operations, stated, "Weather flight members relish the opportunity to work with the Shadow UAS. The platform is at the cutting edge of the military's surveillance and reconnaissance technology. The Shadow is a stepping stone into the future of aviation forecasting for weather flight members."



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## The Florida Air National Guard now has an official Facebook page!

Log onto the page at:


[www.facebook.com/FloridaAirNationalGuard](http://www.facebook.com/FloridaAirNationalGuard)

and click the "Like" button on the page to become a fan.

It's a great way to keep updated on what's going on in the FLANG throughout the month!

# ONE TEAM ONE FIGHT

## ...WITH SAUDI ARABIA



*By Col. Bob Branyon  
125FW Commander*

“Fang push!” calls our flight lead as we cross into enemy territory on a westerly heading. Our mission is to escort Saudi Tornado fighter-bombers into the target area to drop their bombs.

We have formed an 8-ship “wall,” our “Fang” four-ship line-abreast with a four-ship of Saudi F-15Cs, callsign “Eagle.” The eight Saudi F-15 Red force “bandits” race toward us, simulating SU-27 Flankers, to meet our forces and protect their targets. The AWACS controller, callsign “Bandsaw,” paints a verbal picture of the attacking force: “Three group ladder, range 30, lead group

Bullseye 270/40, hostile.” We visualize three sets of bandits 40 miles west of our reference point, all in a straight line and within 30 miles of the leader. “Hostile” means the AWACS has positively identified the group as enemy fighters, and we are cleared to shoot.

“Eagle continue; Fang pump right,” directs Fang 1, the Mission Commander. Eagle flight presses forward as all Fangs execute an immediate turn east, back toward our Tornados to build defense-in-depth. The Eagle pilots unleash their long-range AMRAAM missiles and turn back





*Photo by Capt. Gary Poplin*

Master Sgt. Tom Gorski (right) provides close air support training and control for Saudi Arabian Aircraft.

to the east also. Immediately all of the Bandits aggressively maneuver and defeat the first volley of missiles from Eagle. It's time for the Fang flight to use our new AESA V3 radars, which are able to track and shoot multiple bandits. Our Fang flight quickly targets all of the approaching bandits in our south lane. Additionally, we use the AESA radar to track the fighters chasing the Eagle flight in the north lane, as Eagle is still "cold" from their initial attack.

Now it's money time. The Saudi F-15 pilots, using their fighter data link (FDL), are able to see on their scopes the bandits in the lane behind them because the information is sent electronically from Fang flight's radars. Before the Eagle flight even turns hot, they have their radars set perfectly to target the incoming bandits. "Eagles, hot right," calls their flight lead. Quickly and expertly the Saudi pilots lock-on and shoot the approaching wave of bandits.

Next, there is chaos on the radios because both the Red air and Blue air forces are using a common frequency to pass "kills" to each other. That's 22 fighters on the same freq, with two or three of them trying to pass "kills" at any given time. This causes us to waste missiles and "kill" some of the Red bandits multiple times, because they missed the original kill call against them. When a bandit is killed, he must fly to his regeneration point, simulating that a new Red fighter has launched from an airfield there, with a full load of missiles. Unfortunately, the Blue air is never allowed more missiles, and, near the end of the missions, many

of the F-15s are left with only heat missiles or just their guns...a very dangerous place to be against bandits shooting radar missiles at you from a long distance away.

We have killed all of the initial sweep of eight Red air bandits, and they are headed to their "regen airfields" approximately 30 miles away. Bandsaw calls out the threats to our FANG four-ship: "Two-ship of Bandits west regen airfield. Single bandit over north regen airfield. Two-ship over south regen airfield." That puts our Fang four-ship right in the middle of all three enemy airfields, with Bandits all around us.

Now becomes the most challenging part of an OCA (Offensive Counter-Air) mission: keeping track of the strikers you are trying to protect, figuring out which bandits are the greatest threat, determining which F-15s have the most missiles available, and deciding who is in the best position to prosecute an attack against the incoming bandits...all while you are flying 500 miles an hour! It's why large force OCA missions require graduate-level employment.

To say that we had great training in the Falcon Nest 11 exercise with the Saudis is an understatement. Our first four days of flying consisted of a progressive "building block" approach, starting with 1v1 BFM (dog fighting), to 2v2, then 2v4, followed by 4v4 missions. On Day 5 of the 10-day exercise, we started with the Large Force Employment (LFE) missions, which were a mix of OCA and DCA (Defensive Counter-Air) missions. The scenarios varied from 8v10 missions to a 12v14 mission on the last day. We had both USAF and RSAF (Royal Saudi Air Force) AWACS and tankers supporting each mission. As mentioned, the testing of the Saudi capability to implement FDL was a huge initial objective of the Falcon Nest exercise and resulted in a resounding success.

Another significant objective of the exercise was for a U.S. JTAC (Joint Terminal Attack Controller) to provide state-of-the-art CAS (Close Air Support) training and control from the ground to Saudi Tornado and F-15S (Saudi Strike Eagle) fighters. Master Sgt. Tom Gorski, a JTAC instructor from Nellis AFB, Nev., provided incredible



training to the Saudi ground control crews and the pilots in the air. Gorski is a hulk of a man who could easily play Tarzan in a Hollywood film. He is the real-deal true American hero who has been in multiple firefights working with Army Rangers and Navy SEALs in his JTAC missions. Tom had a standing offer for any U.S. Airman to accompany him on his daily training missions, and several of our folks took him up on the opportunity.

Master Sgt. Gorski drove 90 minutes each day to set up his ROVER (Remotely Operated Video Enhanced Receiver) equipment. On the ground in the village of Goodah in the middle of the desert, Gorski's job is to move close to the intended targets for the day and established an electronic connection with the F-15S SNIPER pod or the Tornado targeting pod, using TV or IR imagery. Once both the JTAC and the pilot/WSO see the same aerial view on their screen, it is up to the JTAC to "talk" the aircrew into moving their targeting "cursor" quickly and precisely to achieve a lock-on to the correct target. This skill is especially critical when friendly troops and enemy troops are in close contact with each other. Many friendly troops have died in past wars from bombs dropped on the wrong target by friendly aircraft. During the exercise outbrief, the Saudis gave rave reviews to the success of the JTAC/CAS training.

So, while ground troops don't like being shot at by friendly aircraft, pilots don't like being shot at by friendly ground troops! Ask any Fang pilot, and I bet he will tell you that his biggest fear in large-scale combat operations is not the

enemy fighters, his fear is being shot down by one of our friendly surface-to-air missile systems. Falcon Nest incorporated some crucial interface training to prevent fratricide in future combat. An Air Defense Liaison Team (ADLT) utilized their Comm Flyaway Kit (CFK) to link up the CAOC in Al-Udied with the Operations Center of King Abdul Aziz Air Base, formerly known as Dhahran Air Base, where we were conducting our flying operations.

After each mission several returning fighters would electronically emit preplanned enemy signals to simulate enemy aircraft chasing our friendly aircraft. The ADLT controllers would use real time electronic "chat-comm" with the CAOC in Qatar to confirm which tracks were friendly and which were hostile, in order to prevent fratricide from friendly ground missile systems. This portion of the exercise was another big win for Falcon Nest.

In addition to great training, it was a fantastic experience for FANG airmen to be able to sample the culture and cuisine of Saudi Arabia. We found the Saudis to be extremely friendly and generous with superb hospitality. We shared many a meal and culminated the exercise with a banquet and traditional Saudi dance ceremonies.

Some of our folks were even treated to camel rides that night. We sat outdoors, cross-legged on carpets, dining on a feast of roasted lamb and camel on a delicious bed of rice. Some chose to use a fork, while others used the Saudi tradition of balling up rice in your palm and flicking into your mouth with your thumb. While the Saudis were very skilled at this, many of the Americans ended up with rice all over their chins and the carpet in front of them.

We exchanged gifts that night and thanked each other for a fantastic exercise and friendships that will last a lifetime. I am sure you have heard of the recently announced enormous F-15 purchase that the Saudis are making from the U.S. The new RSAF F-15s, along with USAF F-15s, will be the most lethal on the Earth. When it comes time to fight a common enemy, you can bet that the U.S. and Saudi F-15 pilots will be lined up, racing toward the enemy, destined for success...thanks to Falcon Nest!



*Photo by Capt. Gary Poplin*

Members of the 125th Fighter Wing Security Forces Squadron stand with members of the Royal Saudi Air Force.



# Leave No Trace...

By Maj. Matthew Giles  
114th ROPS

Recently, I had the opportunity to take part in a hiking excursion with current and former service members. Outward Bound, which offers free adventures to Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom veterans, furnished my adventure in the mountains of Western Maine, courtesy of the Sierra Club. This was my first back-country camping experience, one I purposely chose since I'd never have the opportunity to experience it on my own dime.

The pristine woods of Maine provided a beautiful setting for our group of nine veterans. The experience taught me just how close a group could get in less than a week, sharing our stories and experiences among the current and former servicemen.

We were quick to follow orders and encourage each other, while exhibiting professionalism and precision in each and every aspect of the journey. As I have witnessed, the camaraderie we had is uncommon in the civilian world.

Of the nine veterans in the group, there were individuals fresh off active duty, in the Guard and Reserves and one who had been retired for several years. We represented all four services with two of us representing the Air National Guard. My collection of journal entries follows:

## Day 1

*Arrived Newry, Maine (Lloyd L. Bean Mountain Center) via two hour van ride from Portland.*

*Once on site, we met and were briefed by our two instructors, introduced ourselves to the group of nine students, inspected and packed our personal gear; divided group supplies (food, stoves, tents, tarps, utensils, toilet paper, and trawl) surrendered our digital devices and headed out via foot at 1730. Hiked about one mile to Moose Meadow. We were the first group of hikers on the trail that spring and it was grown over in parts. Military banter started in earnest on which service was toughest, fittest, etc. Setup camp and made spaghetti (using tomato paste mixed in with leftover water) learned the basics of backcountry camping, hygiene, and the philosophy of leaving no trace.*

## Day 2

*Six and a half-mile planned hike from Moose Meadow. Crossed several streams then a snow mobile bridge before lunch. Had lunch (peanut butter and jelly on lead bread) on a small gravel island in a river. Some took dips in the cold river. We were lucky to find a porta-potty nearby in an adjacent camp and took advantage of the opportunity. Headed up Puzzle Mountain afterward. Expected rain that afternoon. Rough, slow moving climb. Started raining around 1900. Hiked until 2100 in hard rain to Stewart Campsite. It was dark when we arrived at camp. Campsite was in rough condition, not very cleared or level, with lots of roots and bad drainage. Setup tents in heavy rain and prepped dinner (vegetable couscous stir fry.)*



*A yellow spotted salamander was found in camp. Rained all night. Hit the sack at midnight. Fortunately, there was an outhouse on site.*

### **Day 3**

*Woke up at 0715... still raining and cold. Sleeping bag and most of my gear wet. A nearly seven-mile hike to Knowll Campsite. Had oatmeal in rain for breakfast. Raindrops were bouncing off my bowl and hitting me in the face. Headed out at 0930. Rained until 1100. Had bagels and cream cheese for lunch. Sun came out early afternoon. Glenn tells us all the unique stuff he finds as a TSA inspector. Arrived at Knowell Campsite at 1700. Had Chili Mac and chocolate chip cookies for dinner. Cleaned up in the river and dried out all my gear over trees and 550 cord. Had a group chat about Iraq and Afghanistan that evening. Clear to see that most of these guys' experiences were much different than mine in Iraq. Our instructors explained that they really enjoyed teaching the vets courses because of the camaraderie of vets.*

### **Day 4**

*Headed on trail at 0800. Climbed up Bald Peak Mountain where we took pictures at the summit. Had veggie cream cheese and crackers for lunch. Nick (our Marine), despite having very little, unselfishly shared his beef jerky. We hit the Appalachian Trail at the summit of Bald Peak*



*Photo by Ryan Hietpas*

**Maj. Johnny Malpass (left) and Maj. Matthew Giles hike on a trail during their Outward Bound excursion.**

*Mountain. Hiked down Bald Peak for a couple hours. This part of the trail was much more worn in due to the heavy traffic. Hiked to where Lloyd believed the hidden campsite was off the AT, then "bushwhacked" through forest without luck while Ryan and Lloyd recon'd for the campsite. Campsite was not found so we "bushwhacked" back to AT and headed further down the trail. I fell off a tree that I was crossing and landed on my pack without injury. Finally found hidden campsite further down trail at 1900 about 100 yards off AT. This campsite was used by trail maintenance teams so it was hidden from AT travelers. Setup camp, got water from stream and made corn chowder, hash brown potatoes and bread. Unfortunately, no outhouse at this campsite so we used the cathole method. Hit the sack at 2000.*

### **Day 5**

*Up at 0630 to get water to start breakfast. I was leader for the day. Five days without a Blackberry, cell phone or any connection to the outside world does wonders. Made cream of wheat and bad coffee for breakfast (learned not to stir coffee grounds while preparing coffee using this method). Ready to hit the trail at 0900. Hiked about 45 minutes down AT then broke off to lookout at Extraordinary View Trail and took pictures. Hiked about 20 minutes further down trail to Outward Bound rock climbing spot where course director Susanne met us. Learned basics of rock climbing then we all took turns climbing the approximately 50' face. Had cold quesadillas for lunch. Hiked down mountain and took van back to Outward Bound property. We were given one hour of personal time in beautiful stream. I believe everyone got cleaned up in the stream. Scene was picture perfect (birds chirping, stream flowing). Met at bridge then hiked to a rough cabin where we would spend the evening. Hiked back to Bean and had dinner prepared by Outward Bound staff (Lasagna, Salad and Brownies). Went back to the cabin and had campfire with lively discussion. Hit the sack at 2100.*

### **Day 6**

*Up at 0450 and went for a run on trail with Tim, Ryan and Nick. Took dip in the stream afterwards.*



*Tim found a dead trout that we later put in Glenn's pack. Made coffee (much better this time) packed up then hiked to Bean Mountain Center at 0700. Inventoried/turned in group supplies, had breakfast and had my first shower in five days. Longest I'd ever gone without shaving. Had a graduation ceremony afterwards where Outward Bound certificates, patches and pins were presented. Heard comments that Johnny and I (the two Air Force guys) were a lot tougher than expected.*

Five days and 25 miles later, I emerged from

the woods sore, tired and very ripe. The terrain was far more than I expected, but I prepared very well for the physical demands. The experience left me fully recharged. While my enthusiasm for nature, newly acquired survival skills and great appreciation for modern plumbing were evident, I discovered a newfound respect for our other services and was engrossed in the first-hand accounts some of the group experienced in war. This experience recharged my enthusiasm to continue to serve. Five days to make ten new friends in the woods of Western Maine. What an adventure!

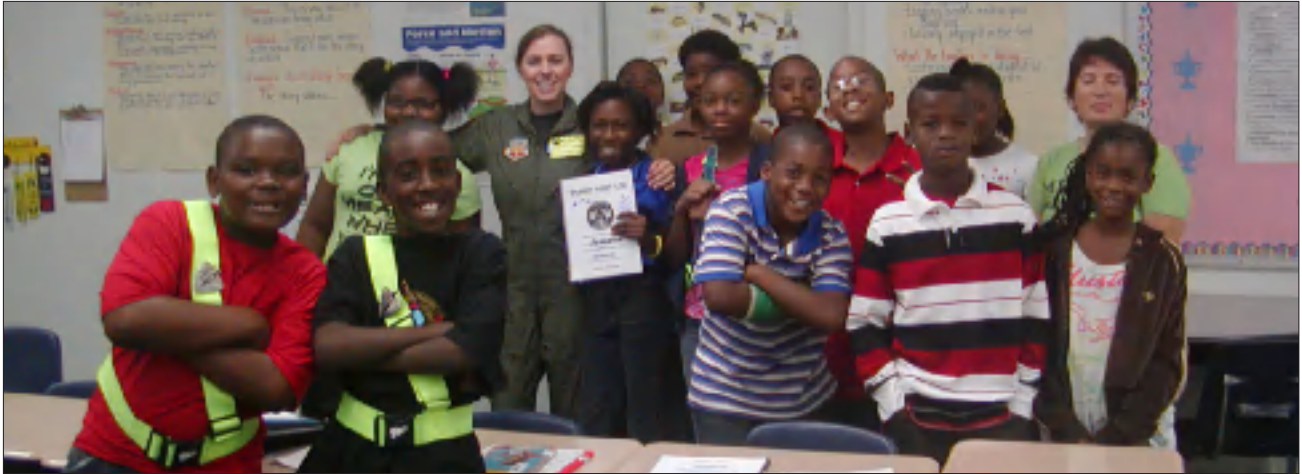


*Photo by Ryan Hicpas*

The group of current and former servicemembers poses at the summit of Bald Peak Mountain, part of the Appalachian Trail, while participating in an Outward Bound excursion in Maine. Outward Bound offers free adventures to OIF and OEF veterans.



# STARBASE



*Photo Courtesy STARBASE*

**Capt. Katrina Hightower visits a class of previous STARBASE graduates at Samuel A Hull Elementary school in Jacksonville.**

*By Greg Stritch  
Director of STARBASE*

Fall and football season are in full swing and the staff at STARBASE Florida are busier than ever. Col. Branyon has allowed us the use of the dining facility as a second classroom so that we can run double patterns. Double classrooms allow us to serve more scholars and reduce the costs of transportation for the schools attending our program.

We have been fortunate this fall to receive gifts from the PGA Tour, the Warren and Augusta Hume Foundation, and Mr. and Mrs. Robert T.

Hyde Jr., which have allowed us to expand the borders of the STARBASE program. Support from our wonderful partners has allowed us to push forward into 3D-AutoCAD, Wind Tunnel Testing and Flight Planning curriculum, adding to the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) of the STARBASE program at the 125th.

We've also spent an enjoyable morning with Gretchen Titshaw (wife of Florida Adjutant General Maj. Gen. Emmett Titshaw) and Judy Hall demonstrating some of what is taught to our scholars. Titshaw serves on our Board of Directors and it was nice for her to get a first-hand taste of what happens in the classroom.

Capt. Katrina Hightower has been an inspiration to our scholars. She's spent a lot of her valuable time sharing her experiences with the students and encouraging them to pursue their dreams, because Dreams+Action+Reality®. She even graciously made a visit to Samuel A. Hull Elementary to speak to a class she hadn't been able to speak to when they were at STARBASE.

Hopefully she won't develop carpal tunnel syndrome from all the autographs she's been signing for the students!



*Photo Courtesy STARBASE*

**Lee McCook and a scholar from Long Branch Elementary School demonstrate inertia with the "Hat of Science" during a STARBASE session at the 125th Fighter Wing, Jacksonville.**



# Quality of life project is proud work for 202nd REDHORSE



Senior Airman Christopher Linton operates a grader while working on construction of a clinic in Window Rock, Ariz.

*Story and photos by Senior Master Sgt. James Householder  
202 REDHORSE*

The 202nd REDHORSE at Camp Blanding, Fla., recently deployed a team of specialized craftsmen to continue with the upgrade of St Michaels Association for Special Education, a community based school focused on the development of primarily Navajo children and young adults with physical and mental handicaps in Window Rock, Ariz.

Civil Engineering efforts on the five-acre campus are part of the Air National Guard's use of the DOD's Innovative Readiness Training program (IRT) which links civilian humanitarian projects with specialized readiness training for military units.

The IRT projects at St Michaels began in 2010 and are scheduled to continue for the next five years. The work at the school will provide ANG Civil Engineers with training in building design, surveying, site development, equipment operations, as well as work for the mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and carpentry trades.

Upon completion, the project at St Michaels will have added or renovated more than 10,000 square feet of facilities which include two new classrooms, an auditorium, a community center, and the recently completed nurses' station. Due to the physical limitations of some the students, all the facilities on the

campus will be constructed to be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act standards.

"The project is estimated to include over thirty ANG Civil Engineering Units and provide over 100,000 man-hours of AFSC upgrade and specialty training, while saving the St Michael's Academy and the Navaho Indian Nation more than \$1 million in construction costs. The influx of military personnel traveling to the area will also directly affect the local community with an estimated impact of over \$300,000 over the next five years" said Maj. Mark Keels, 202REDHORSE project engineer.

Members of the 202REDHORSE were the eighth and final team for this fiscal year. While on site, Airmen from the structures shop honed carpentry skills by putting the final touches on the clinic and nurses' station, and installing new windows and siding on the schools maintenance support building. Site development work provided the team equipment operator with "stick time" on several pieces of equipment to include a grader, a bulldozer, a frontend loader, and a dump truck. The new 10-room, 2,600 square-foot clinic is a vast



From left to right, Senior Airman Christopher Linton, Tech. Sgt Scott Patino, Senior Airman Sam Ryon, Senior Airman Alex Castillo and Senior Airman Jeffery Starratt pose in front of the Code Talker statue at Window Rock, Ariz.



improvement over the small one-room clinic used in the past. The new facility will directly impact the quality of care given to the special needs students.

One of the most remarkable things about the trip was to work and interact within a predominately Native American culture. When living in North Florida, contact with this quiet culture is very rare, so to get a glimpse of the blend of Native American heritage and modern life was very enlightening. On several occasions the REDHORSE crew had lunch with the students in their new cafeteria, a very interesting experience for both Airmen and student as the students seemed to enjoy the rare company of military members; we received a lesson in diversity.

Airmen working on the project also got a chance to visit Window Rock, a landmark and sacred mountain to the Navajos. Window Rock is also the capital of the Navajo Nation. A park at the site contains a sculpture dedicated to the legendary Navajo Code Talkers of World War II; a part of military history in which the Navajos are very proud.

As for the construction at the school, nothing is more rewarding than working to improve the



Col. Jack Paschal shakes hands with Gillis Chapela, executive director of St Michaels Association for Special Education.

quality of life for the disadvantaged, and as a bonus, hone our skills and receive training for future deployments.

Members of the 202REDHORSE engineering section are currently aiding in planning and building design for the next phase of construction scheduled to begin in the spring of 2011.



Senior Airman Christopher Linton operates a piece of equipment while working to build new clinic on a Navajo reservation in Window Rock, Ariz. The new clinic will be 2,600 square feet and have 10 rooms compared to the old clinic that had only one.



# FLANG Time Capsule

## Relic of the Cold War Era: The F-106 Display

By Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Donald Barnhart  
FLANGRA

How many times have you said, “How did they do that?” Every time I drive into the entrance of Camp Blanding Joint Training Center and view the F-106 pointing into the air, those words cross my mind. Space doesn’t allow going into the entire history, but it is a good story.

Col. (Ret.) Frank Kozdras and myself were members of the board of directors for the Camp Blanding Museum and during a meeting one of us complained that the Florida Air National Guard did not have a site. The president of the board challenged us to do something about that.

Every museum exhibit or memorial has a theme, and since the Cold War Era was not represented, we felt that it should be our theme. The FLANG exhibit would, of course, have to have a centerpiece aircraft but with no dollars and no aircraft, it was going to be a stretch. The FLANG flew the Convair Delta Dart F-106 for a period of 13 years from 1970 to 1983, which was during the Cold War Era, and there were still some F-106 drones at Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla.

The museum committed funds to get the project off the ground. With the help of Lt. Col. David Barnhart and Maj. Steve Boe, stationed at Tyndall AFB, a drone was identified and paperwork was initiated to secure the aircraft.

Rescuing the condemned aircraft was the first hurdle, but the next was a lot harder since moving an aircraft that no longer flies takes equipment and money, as well as a team with time, energy and expertise. After all efforts of support seemed to fail, the FLANG Retirees – led by Lt. Cols. (Ret.) Ernie Webster, Durham Searcy, Henry Simmons and Master Sgt. (Ret.) Jack Stuart – developed the

strategy to keep the project moving forward.

Stuart put together the Retiree Taskforce to recover and reassemble the aircraft. He recruited a team which included Chief Master Sgt. (Ret.) Charlie Tanner, Senior Master Sgt. (Ret.) Robert Harding, Master Sgts. (Ret.) Dennis Boardman, Ray Hatcher, Don Helms, and George Lantz. Every retiree donated their time, provided their own tools and paid their own expenses.

The 202nd REDHORSE implemented an aircraft crash recovery exercise. Tasking included disassembling, loading and transporting aircraft remains 300 miles to Camp Blanding. The recovery team was led by Chief Master Sgt. (Ret.) Den-

nis Mineweaser, Master Sgts. Wayne Meyer and Larry Linton, and Tech. Sgt. Allen Brinkey.

March 2, 2001, the team moved to the flight line at Tyndall AFB, and began the disassembly process. Senior Master Sgt. Faye Hough, an active duty Air Force retiree from Tyndall AFB, joined our team and added valuable assistance, since he knew his way around the base.

Other volunteers from the Air National Guard unit located at Tyndall AFB included Lt. Col. Dave Webster, Maj. Dan Celveau, Chief Master Sgt. Dan Atkinson, Senior Master Sgt. Billy Long, Gregory Bray, and Octavious Clark. Lt. Col. (Ret.) Ernie Webster brought his recreational vehicle to be used as a shelter, mess hall, and base of operation on the flight line. The weather held up and on March 12, 2001, at 5:30 p.m. the trucks rolled into Camp Blanding with the disassembled F-106.

Today you can see the F-106 guarding the front gate at Camp Blanding, a tribute to all those men and women of the FLANG who served during the “Cold War Era” from 1945-1991.



Photo by Debra Cox

# Family Focus

By Laura Pageau  
FLANG Family Program Coordinator

I remember clearly the day I left for basic training. I looked back at my house and saw my mom waving goodbye from the kitchen window with a big smile on her face. I was only 17 years old and had a lot of growing up to do, and I learned quick! I was not able to go home for Thanksgiving that year but was able to go home for Christmas. My security was back; coming from a big family the holidays meant everything to me.

The next year I was engaged and went home with my fiancé Scott. We shared a joyous (not!) 13-hour Greyhound bus ride on Christmas Eve from the furthest point west in New York to the furthest point north. Not having met Scott's mom or sister, we all shared a weary, but very fun, Christmas Eve together and slept late on a snowy Christmas morning. That was my first of many holidays spent away from my family.

Over the years, my own family grew and there were times we were unable to get back "home" for the holidays. Luckily we had family visit and in true military fashion we shared the holidays with the friends we made where we lived. It was fun sharing our holiday traditions with our friends and learning about theirs, but in the back of my mind it was never the same.

Moving overseas brought a new dimension to the holidays. Interestingly enough, our British friends embraced our Thanksgiving celebration and we learned that the community in Plymouth, England, has a Thanksgiving celebration every year! My family thoroughly enjoyed sharing the history of Thanksgiving and we learned about England's Christmas holiday traditions.

Living in Norway also brought a new dimension to our learning of the holidays. Our Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish friends enjoyed our Thanksgiving meal with rivalries between them that were fun to listen to and learn from. I'm convinced there is nothing more magical than a Scandinavian Christmas; perhaps it's my Swedish heritage, but I truly felt at home.

Our first Christmas in Norway our neighbor Magnus came over offering to help me string lights in my apple tree. Scott was gone and I thought it was nice to have the help. The first question was the color of lights – luckily I had chosen white. I think they were nervous, since Americans like to celebrate Christmas in color with blinking lights and inflatables, but that is not the style in Norway and I had done my homework. I think my neighbors were thankful and that paid off in dividends. From then on, Magnus would snowblow my walkway when Scott was out of town and that made me VERY thankful.

I've been back in the United States since 2006 and look back fondly on all of the holidays we've celebrated elsewhere. At first I was so desperate to go "home," and I still love to see my family every chance I get. But what I've realized is that family is what you make it and everywhere we've been we've had friends that are as close as family, and those relationships will stay with me and my children forever. Instead of being resentful for the military taking me away from my nuclear family, I'm thankful for the opportunity to have grown a global family, full of love and support wherever we go.





## Safety Matters

*By Senior Master Sgt. Dana Gaffney  
125FW Safety Office*

For many, this is the happiest time of the year – a time for family gatherings, good fellowship, and laughter. It is a time when we should step back and reflect on our blessings and all the good that surrounds us. We must also look at how we can ensure this is a safe and joyous season for all.

Over the next six weeks our Airmen and their families will travel to various destinations in both the local area and around the country to share this joyful season. The crowded roads and potential for adverse weather have made this long weekend one of the most dangerous in terms of potential traffic accidents. During this time, it is especially important that we, as leaders, ensure our Airmen and their families are aware of these potential dangers. Here are a few tips to help keep holiday travel safe and healthy:

- Take your car in and make sure it's ready for travel. Some items to check are the battery, brakes, tires and heater.
- Always wear your seatbelts.
- Fatigue on the road can be a killer. Make sure you're well-rested when you drive and take frequent rest stops.
- When on the road, concentrate on safe and defensive driving, not on making phone calls, looking at maps, etc.
- Never drink and drive!!

***Have a safe holiday season and a  
Happy New Year!***

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The third quarter 2010 Outstanding Safety Performance Award winner was Master Sgt. Bruce Hartke from the maintenance squadron at the 125th Fighter Wing. He was awarded with a certificate and a \$25 gift card to Outback Steakhouse. Congratulations!

If you have recently witnessed a safe practice or a "safety attitude," nominate that individual by submitting an AF Form 1206 to the 125FW Safety Office. The form can be found on the wing safety website.

# Chaplain's Corner

By Lt. Col. Steven E. Thompson  
125FW Chaplain

**I**t is important to remember to remember; or restated, to not forget to not forget! You can be certain that forgetting to remember and its twin sibling failing to remember not to forget will inevitably jog your mind and embarrass your heart. That is exactly what happened to me as I prepared to write this note. I was given the assignment a couple of weeks ago...and I forgot to remember and in doing so failed to remember not to forget to write my article.

Forgetting to remember and/or not remembering to not forget is not particularly unique unto me. I imagine you have forgotten a thing or two in your day (regardless of whether your "days" are few or many thus far). If you are not remembering that you have, like me, forgotten many things that you wanted to remember, I submit you are currently experiencing forgetfulness and are failing to remember those things you most recently forgot.

**F**orgetting to remember not to forget is pretty normal for those of us spinning lots of plates in the midst of our busy schedules (remember the guy on the children's programs who spins plates atop a dozen upright poles). While not remembering to not forget can significantly diminish our lives and the

lives of those we care about more than we would ever want to remember, there are some benefits to forgetting to remember.

It is good to remember what we learned from our past failures and allow those disappointments to rest peacefully in our basket of forgets. It is good for us to remember lessons we learned about our actions and how they contributed to our fusses and feuds. It is good to forget the hurts that others have caused us. It is very good to remember the causes of our scars and, at the same time, forget the wounds that would bind us from life's waiting adventures.

**T**he Bible reminds us almost 250 different times to remember our connections (family and friends), our commitments (including service to our state and country) and our Creator. As we enter the special seasons of Christmas, New Year's Eve, Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Income Tax (ugh!), Mother's and Father's Days, Independence Day, school starts, Labor Day, Mother-in-Law Day (October 23, 2011) – every day, every month and every season are pretty special – let's remember and not forget to be grateful and encourage one another. Remember to not forget; or, don't forget to remember ... I think either will work!



# In the Spotlight...



*Photo by Master Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa*

American Attitude band members Tech. Sgt. Chris Henderson (left), Petty Officer 1st Class Matt Smithers, Master Sgt. Marc Myers and Master Sgt. Shawn Watchhorn pose behind an F-15 Eagle at the 125th Fighter Wing, Jacksonville, Fla.

*By Master Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa  
Florida National Guard Public Affairs*

## Playing with **‘Attitude’**

All-military rock band strikes  
chords in music industry

When the band American Attitude formed four years ago the members just wanted to fill some empty seats at their NCO club on drill weekends.

The Guardsmen from the Florida Air National Guard’s 125th Fighter Wing thought their hard-rock cover band would only provide some much-needed entertainment at the Jacksonville F-15 base, and with the base commander’s permission they started playing unit parties and events.

Now, after a few years of also playing local bars and charity events in Northeast Florida, American Attitude has officially broken into the music industry: the band landed a recording deal, is writing original material and playing in Las Vegas.

American Attitude members Master Sgt. Shawn Watchorn (guitar), Master Sgt. Marc Myers (drums) and Tech. Sgt. Chris Henderson (vocals) are all full-time Guardsman at the 125th. Navy Reservist Petty Officer 1st Class Matt Smithers (bass) completes the hard-rocking quartet during its shows.

Smithers, who joined the band after the original bass player left, described their style and stage presence as a spontaneous blend of “feel-good, high-energy music” that is difficult to categorize.

“It’s a combination of metal, rock, funk and punk,” he explained. “It’s really just a fusion thing...we say it’s a hard rock base, but we incorporate so many different flavors of music. If it ‘rocks’ we’ll play it.”

The band started gaining attention earlier this year after Watchorn posted some of its original music online at GIJams.com. The website – dedicated to promoting military musicians – was the brainchild of legendary songwriter Denny Randell, and featured American Attitude with other bands from across the country. Watchorn said he didn’t think anything would really come of it, but about a month later he got a phone call from Randell himself.

“He called us up and said he loved our music and the fact we were all military members,” Watchorn said. “He liked that we were creating our own music, and juggling our music with our jobs and families.”

When Randell asked if American Attitude was interested in signing with his new record label called “GI Jams” and being featured on a forthcoming compilation album of military artists, the band jumped at the opportunity. As part of the deal, American Attitude played a recent GI Jams Veteran’s Day concert in Las Vegas, and is looking at a possible tour with the label in 2011.

“We never imagined it would get to this level,” Watchorn admitted.

While they still practice regularly in Myers’ cramped and crowded garage, the band members have moved beyond just performing cover songs and are making their mark with original American Attitude songs.

The members spend weeks writing original material, with Watchorn sketching out the rough structure of the songs and vocalist Henderson putting the lyrics together. A few “jam sessions” later they have a song ready to try out on their audience.

“I don’t know if other bands do it that way, but it just works really well for us,” Smithers said.

While their material runs the gamut from mellow to upbeat party songs, one piece – “Redemption” – tackles the serious issue of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

“When I wrote the lyrics for Redemption I thought that PTSD was something that really needs to be brought to the forefront more,” Henderson said. “I had been reading some articles and listening to interviews about how it has been kind of ignored or almost shunned. You can get a broken arm mended, but if you have some sort of psychological trauma to have to just suck it up and not even bring it up. We need to change the way people look at it.”

Between deployments, family obligations and work duties, the band members are still able to perform regularly and keep finding new venues for their music.

“I don’t think American Attitude has ever booked a gig and had to call back and say ‘We can’t make it,’” said Myers, who credits their success to a strong work ethic and understanding families. “I know bands that aren’t in the military and cancel gigs all the time.”

Now that they have a record deal the band members are focusing more on original material than ever before, and according to Watchorn they see any performances as an opportunity to promote the National Guard and military service.

“Every time we’re out we still put an American Flag on the stage and tell everyone about the Guard and the military,” he said. “We always give a shout out to the members of the Armed Forces past and present. We’re a Sailor and Airmen all the time, so we project that out in public too.”

American Attitudes original music can be found at GIJams.com, and more information on the band can be found on its Facebook website.



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